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(54) **DRIVING APPARATUS FOR SPEED CHANGING AND STEERING OF A VEHICLE**

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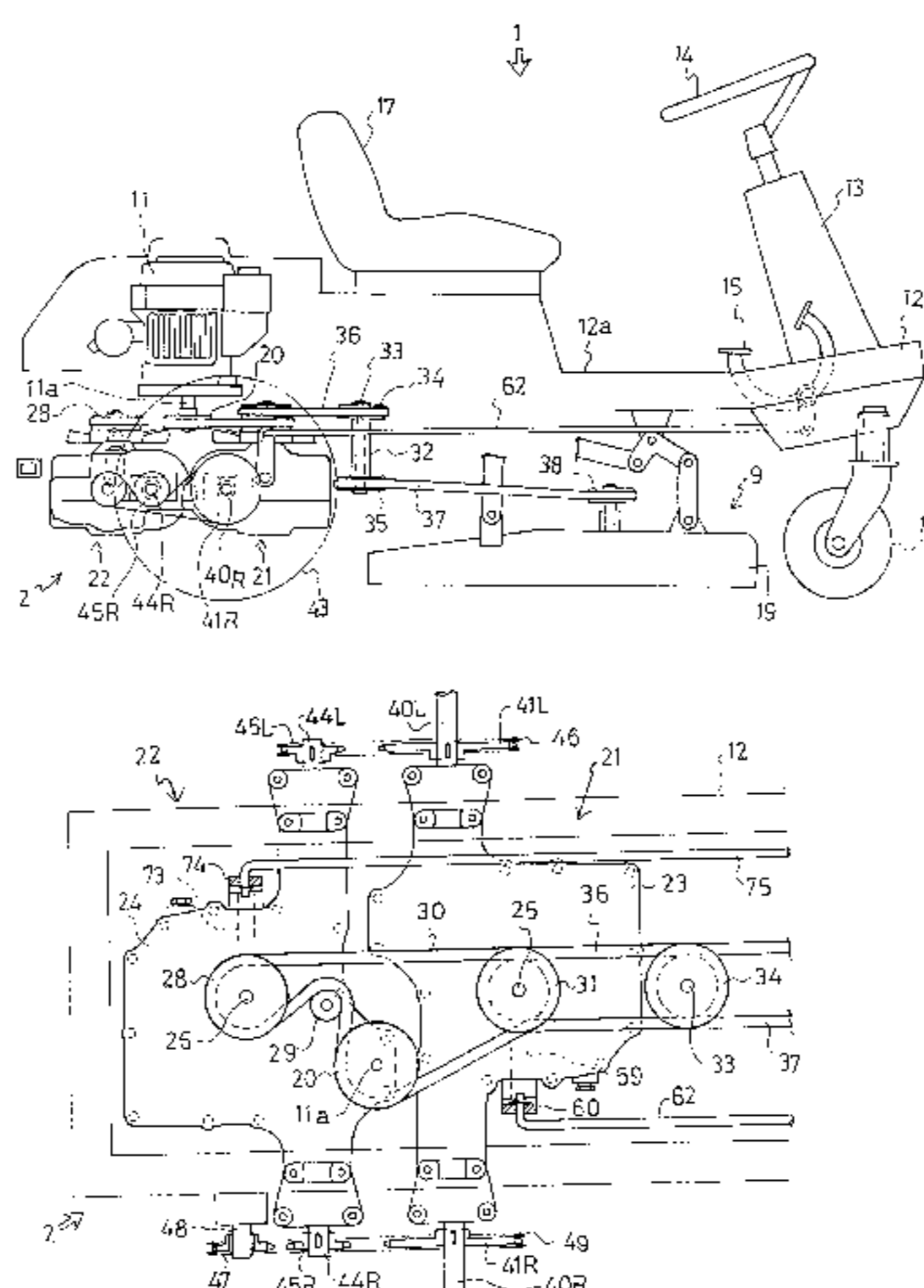
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A driving apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle consists of a first driving unit for speed changing in advancing and reversing and a second driving unit for steering, which are arranged in a longitudinal row and are attached to a vehicle chassis. Each of the first driving unit and the second driving unit has a common structure, which comprises a housing and an HST and left and right differential output shafts contained in the housing. A left first differential output shaft and a left second differential output shaft are connected with each other so as to be rotated in the same direction, and a right first differential output shaft and a right second differential output shaft are connected with each other so as to be rotated in opposite directions. Both first and second HSTs of the first driving unit and a second driving unit receives power from engine through a common single belt. A movable swash plate of a hydraulic pump of the first HST is connected to a speed change pedal and a movable swash plate of a hydraulic pump of the second HST is connected to a steering wheel.

72 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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Fig. 1

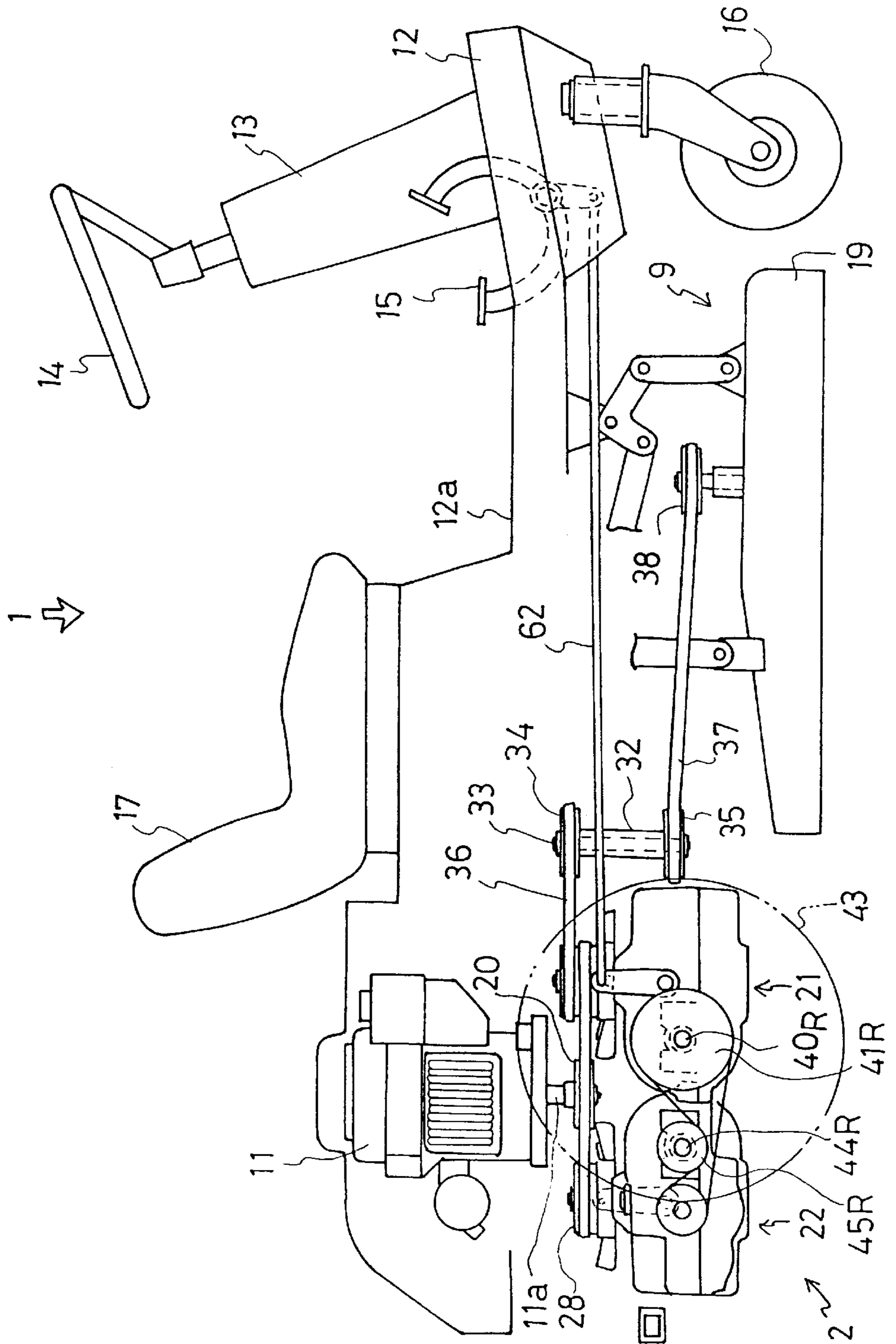


Fig.2

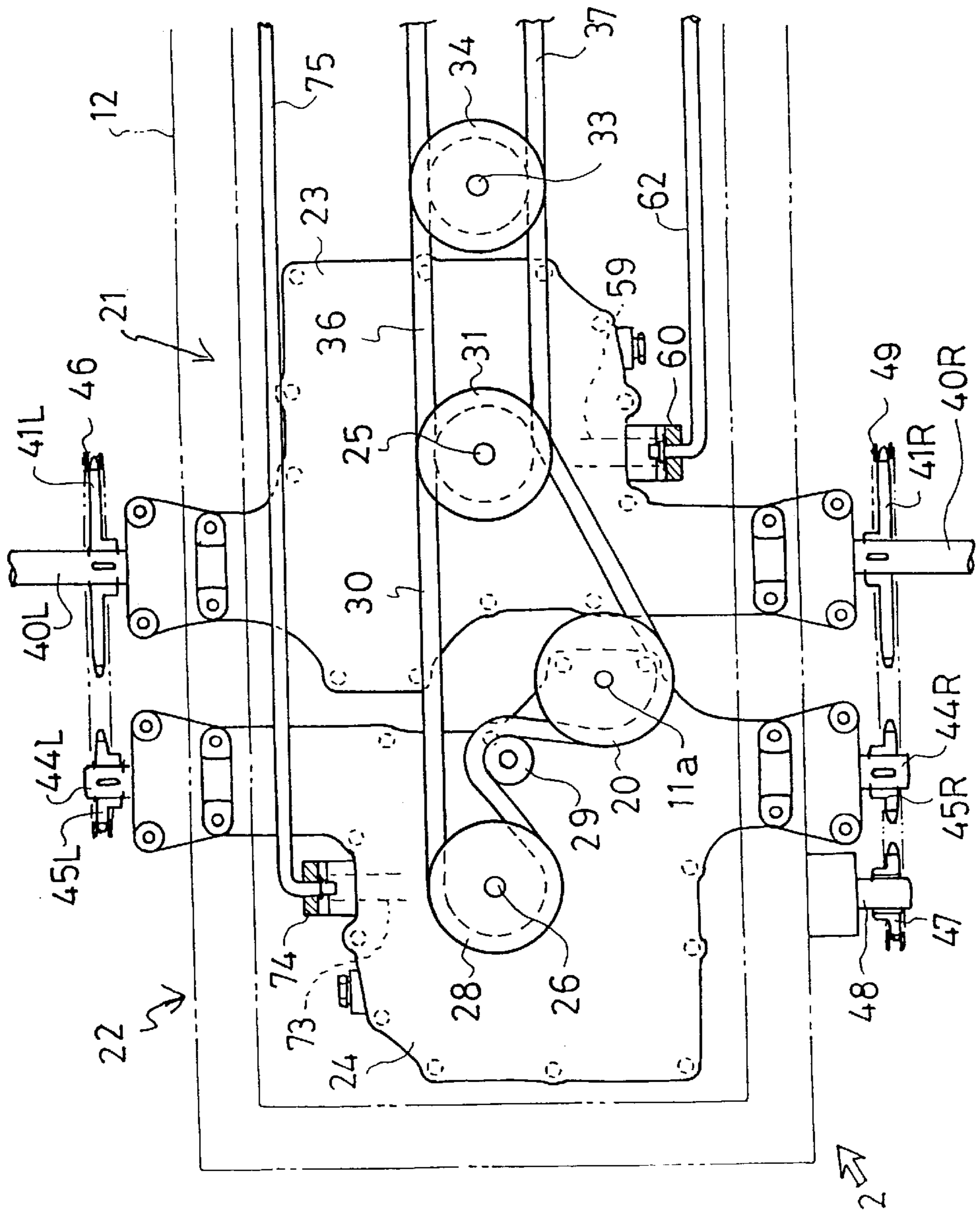


Fig. 3

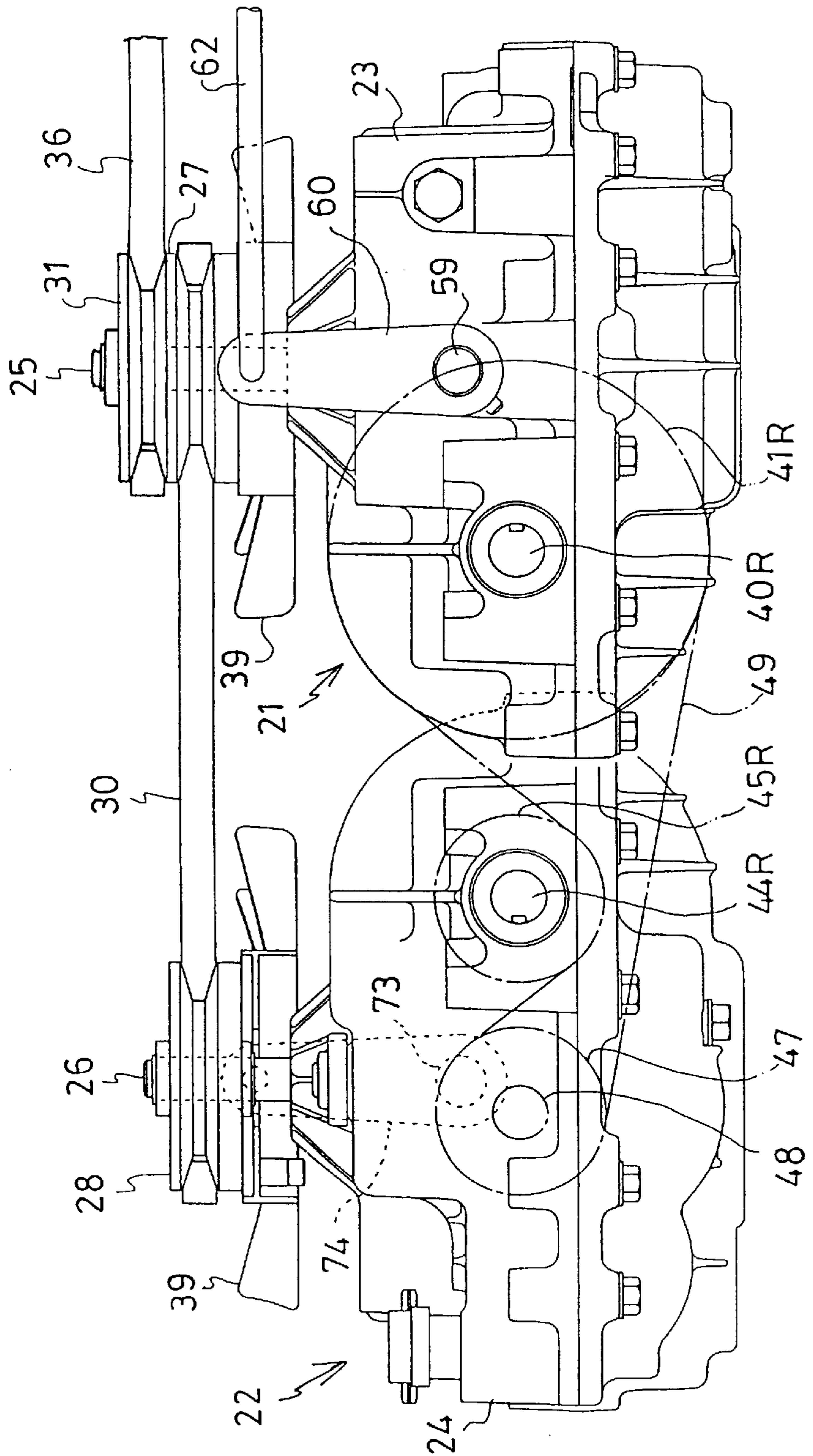


Fig.5

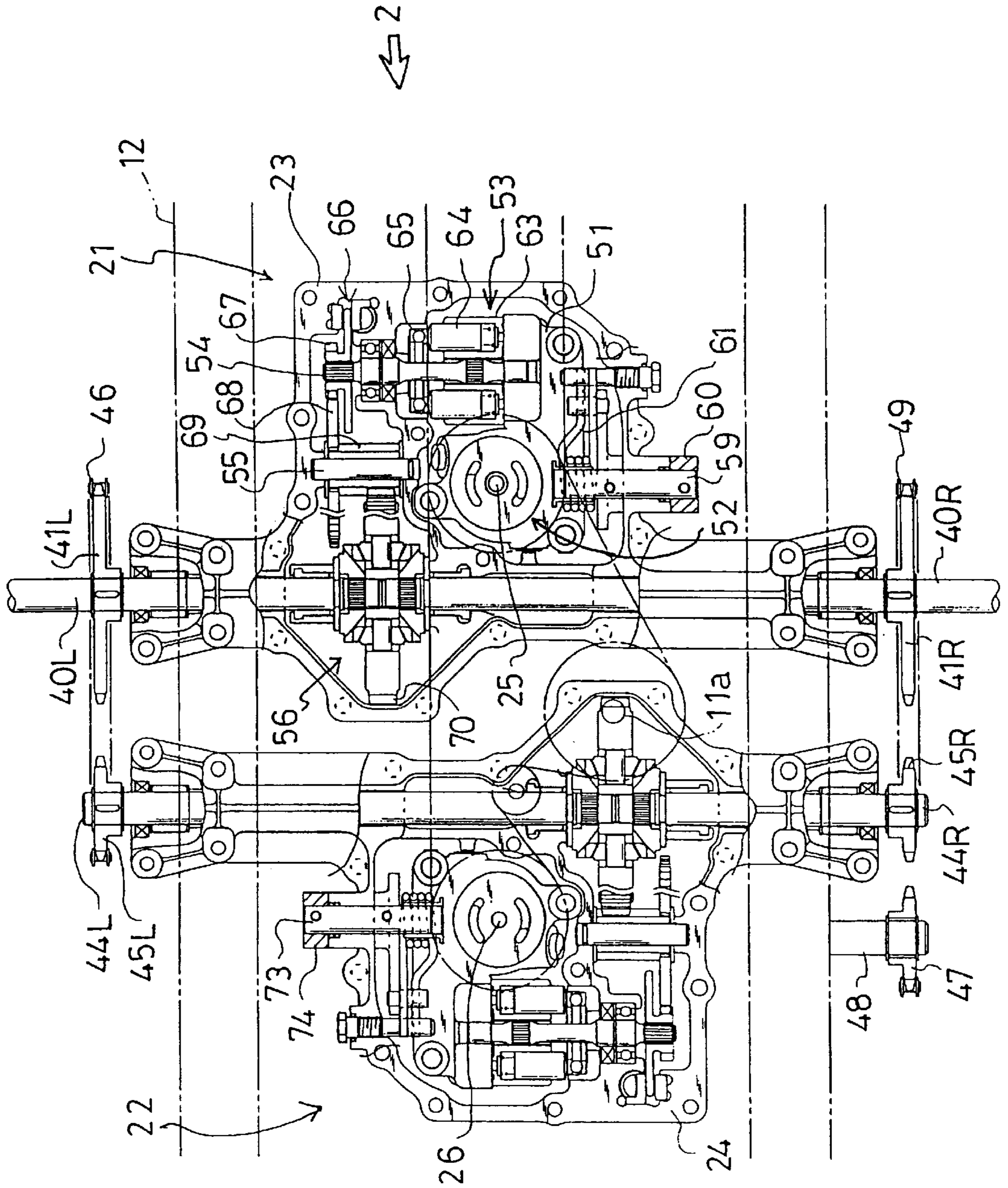


Fig.6

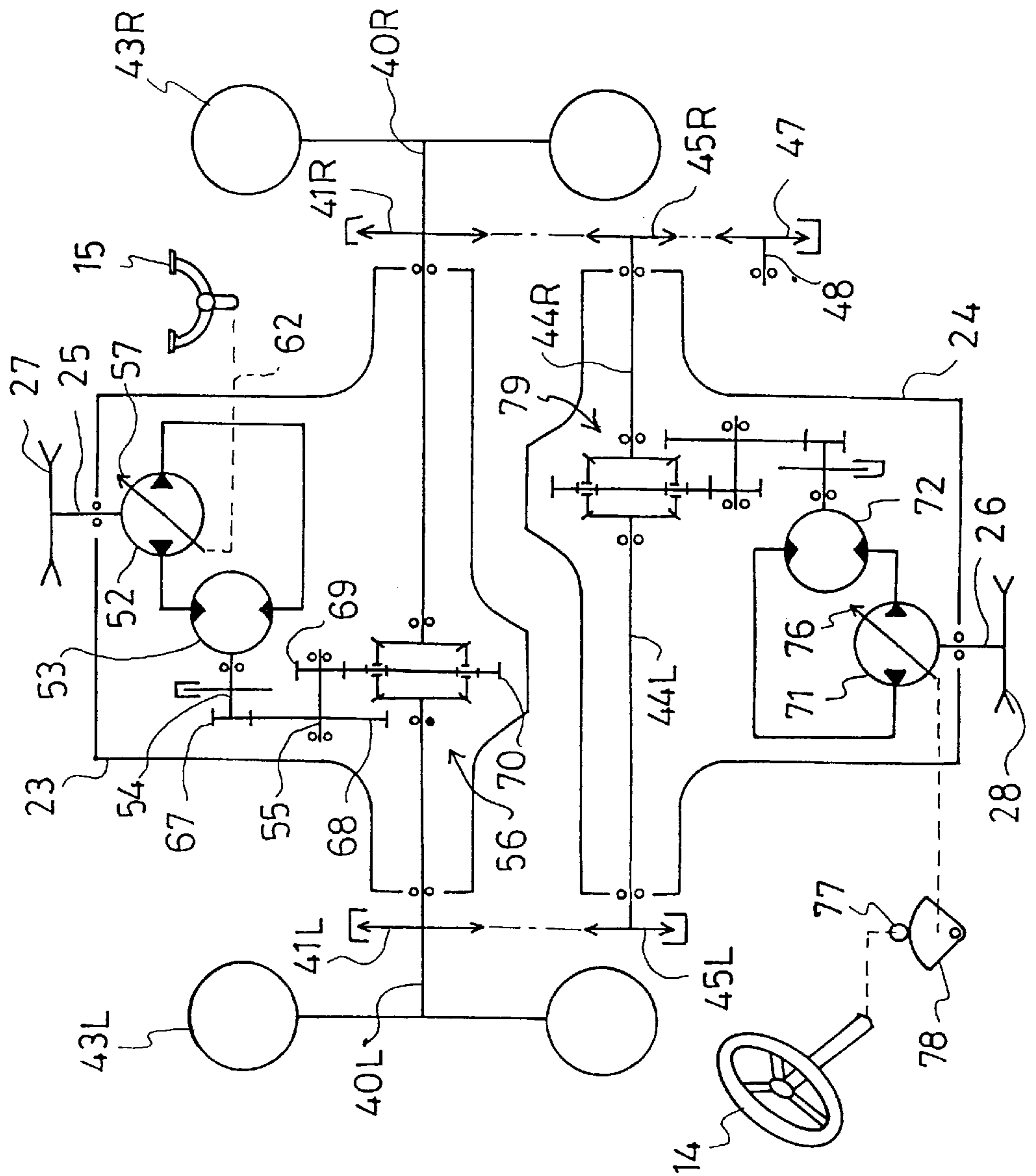


Fig. 7

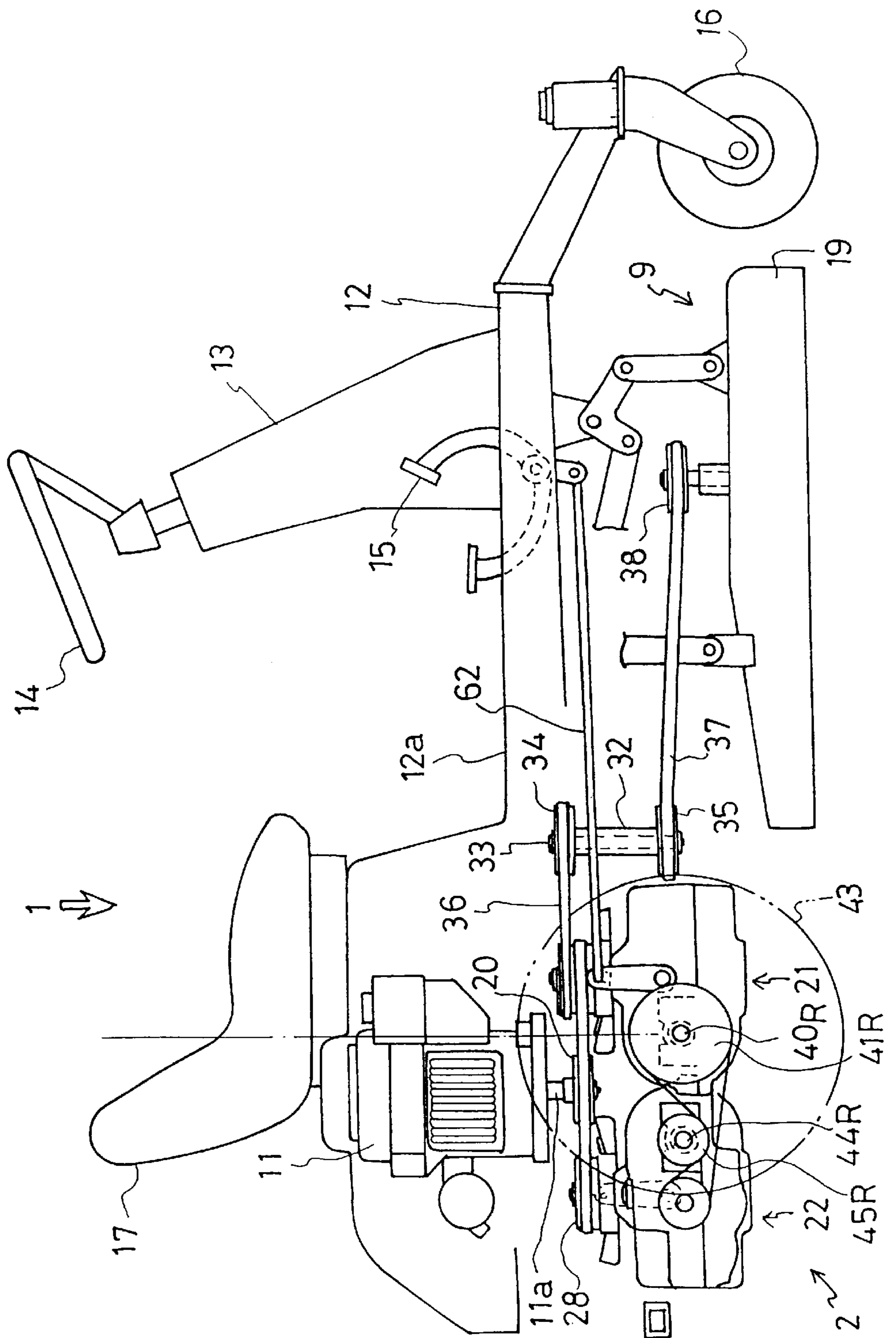


Fig. 8

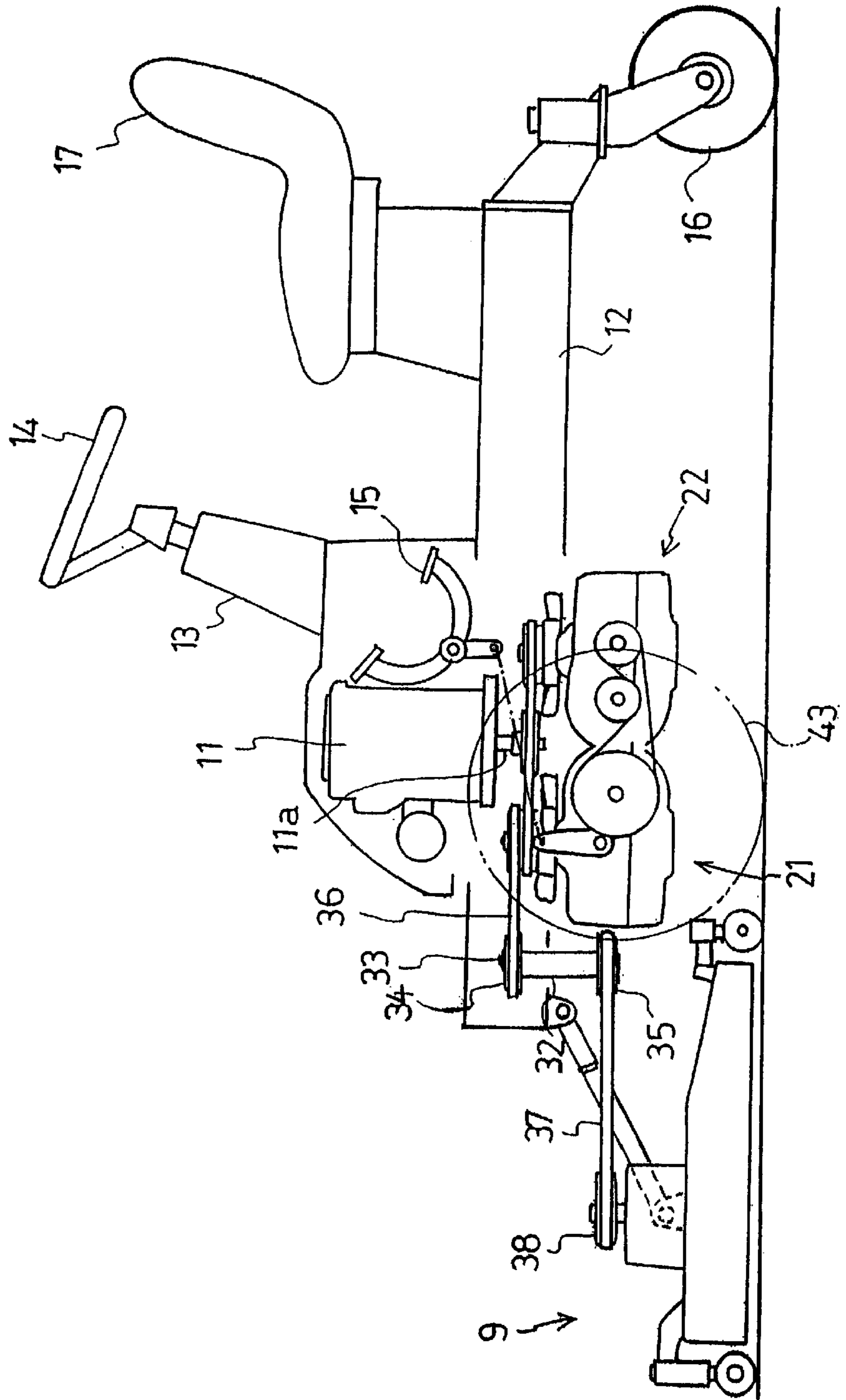
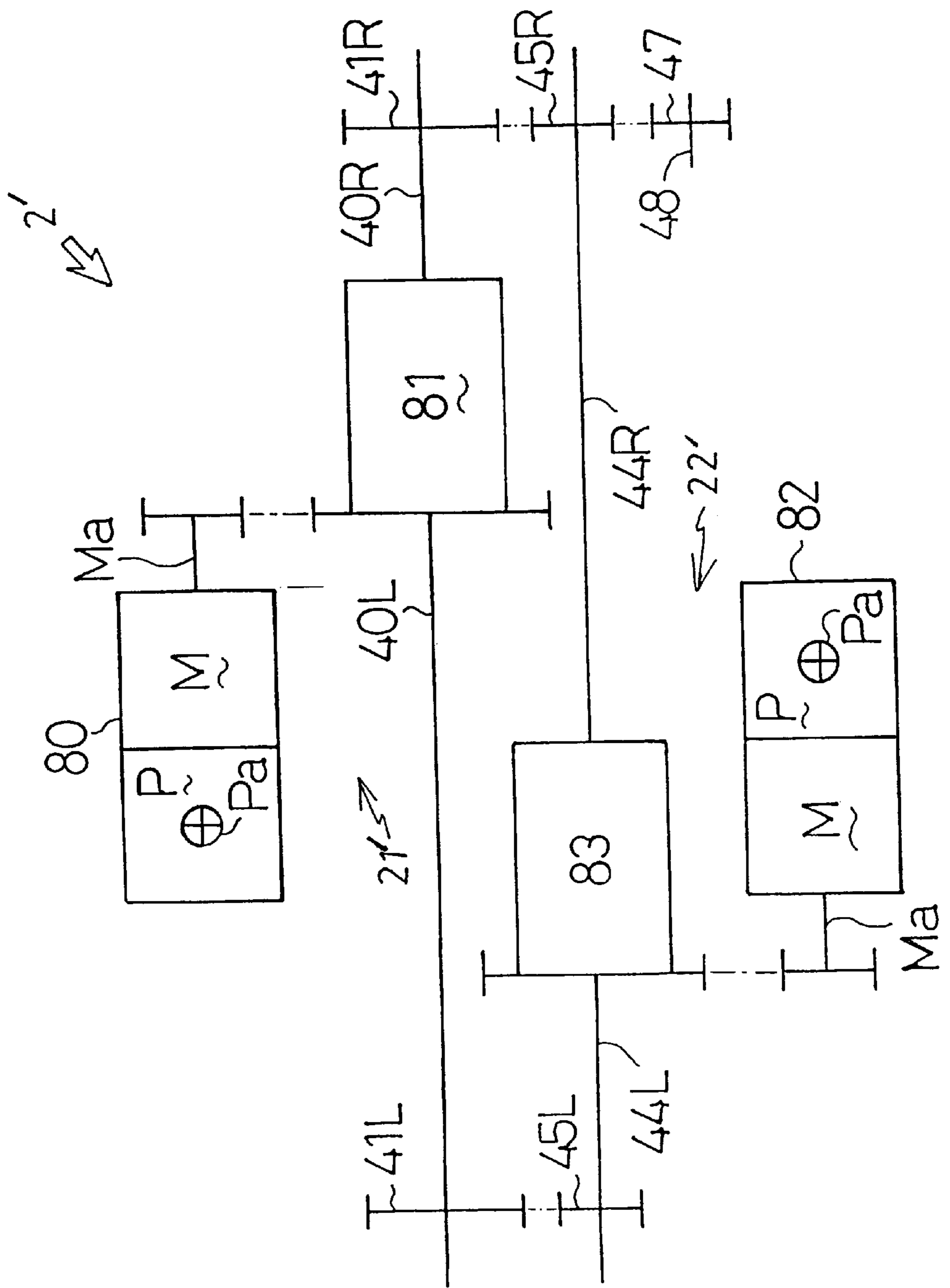


Fig. 9



DRIVING APPARATUS FOR SPEED CHANGING AND STEERING OF A VEHICLE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a driving apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle comprising a pair of hydrostatic transmissions (hereinafter referred to as HSTs) for driving a pair of left and right axles, wherein one of the pair is used for steering and the other is used for speed changing in advancing and reversing.

2. Background Art

U.S. Pat. No. 4,782,650, for example, describes a vehicle provided with a pair of HSTs, which are disposed in a lateral row and are connected with each other, and left and right axles projecting respectively from the pair of the HSTs laterally outwardly. Driving wheels are fixed respectively onto utmost ends of the axles. The left and right axles are driven respectively by changing operation of slanting angles of movable swash plates of the pair of HSTs.

The left and right axles are driven at the same speed by the pair of HSTs in case of straight advancing and reversing. They are driven at different speeds in case of steering.

However, because the above mentioned conventional vehicle uses a different HST to drive each axle, it can advance or reverse straight only when the output rotational speeds of the pair of the HSTs are equal. Thus, each of the HSTs needs to be adjusted with respect to its output speed for a long time while in operation. Additionally, accuracy is required to produce parts of the HSTs to minimize different outputs between them. For example, if there is a difference in volume between hydraulic pumps or motors of the pair of the HSTs, feelings both in turning left and right are different from each other, thus the vehicle becomes hard to control.

Additionally, the above-described conventional vehicle is laterally wide because the pair of HSTs are laterally disposed between the left and right driving wheels.

Furthermore, a speed changing operating tool, such as a speed change pedal, is connected respectively to both output regulating members of the pair of HSTs. A steering operating tool, such as a steering wheel, is also connected to both HSTs. This results in complicated linkages between the speed changing operating tool and the both output regulating members, and between the steering operating tool and the both output regulating members. Thus, the cost for production of the linkages and the space required for them in the vehicle are increased. These linkages also require a more complicated control system for a steering wheel and a speed changing pedal.

Other conventional vehicles control steering using steered front wheels. These vehicles, however, have a large turning radius which is inefficient when operating in crowded areas. For example, when mowing lawn near trees, steered front wheels are inefficient because it takes several passes in order to complete the area adjacent to a single tree.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A first object of the present invention is to provide a compact, low production cost driving apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle including a pair of similarly structured driving units, each of which comprises a housing, an HST, a differential gear unit drivingly connected with the HST, and a pair of differential output shafts, enabling a vehicle provided with the driving apparatus to be

operated in a straight line without requiring adjustment to equalize the output of both driving units and to have a small turning radius.

To achieve the first object, the driving apparatus consists of a first driving unit for speed changing in advancing and reversing of the vehicle, which integrally includes a first HST driven by a prime mover and a pair of left and right projecting differential output shafts drivingly connected with the first HST. The driving apparatus also includes a second driving unit for steering of the vehicle, which integrally includes a second HST driven by the prime mover and a pair of left and right projecting differential output shafts drivingly connected with the second HST. A pair of drive trains are interposed between each of the first and second differential output shafts. One of the drive trains drivingly connects the left first and left second output shafts with each other, the other drivingly connects the right first and right second output shafts with each other, so that the first and second differential output shafts connected by one of the two drive trains are rotated in the same direction with respect to each other and the other first and second differential output shafts connected by the other drive train are rotated in opposite directions with respect to each other.

In such a construction, an output regulating member of the first HST is connected with a speed changing operating tool, such as a foot pedal, to be used for speed changing in advancing and reversing. Driving wheels are attached to the first differential output shafts. The output regulating member of the second HST is connected with a steering operating tool, such as a steering wheel, to be used for steering.

Accordingly, the vehicle can spin or turn at a small radius. Also, the first differential output shafts projecting laterally from the single first driving unit can be used as left and right driving axles, so that the left and right axles do not need to be adjusted to equalize their speed, thereby simplifying the work when operating the vehicle in forward or reverse. Additionally, in a vehicle with multiple wheels, only the differential drive of the pair of driving wheels attached to the first differential output shafts is required for steering, thereby allowing a vehicle with multiple wheels to have simple driven wheels.

The speed of advancing and reversing of the vehicle can be steplessly changed by operation of the speed changing operating tool (the foot pedal) easily because of the stepless output regulation of the first HST. The vehicle can also be steered smoothly and easily by operation of the steering operating tool (the steering wheel) because of the stepless output regulation of the second HST.

The linkage between the speed changing operating tool and the output regulating member of the first HST and the linkage between the steering operating tool and the output regulating member of the second HST are simple and compact. These linkages are compactly disposed below an operator's deck.

The first and second driving units are attached to a vehicle chassis so as to be juxtaposed in either front or rear of each other, thereby enabling the vehicle provided with the driving apparatus to be laterally narrow. Thus, the vehicle can be compact and can have a very small turning circle in addition to the above mentioned drive trains.

With regard to the transmitting mechanism between an output shaft of the prime mover and the input shafts of the first and second HSTs of the first and second driving units, the output shaft is disposed between the input shafts of the first and second HST. Pulleys fixed onto the output shaft of the prime mover and the two input shafts of the first and

second HSTs are bound with a single belt. Accordingly, the space required for the transmitting mechanism is small, thereby allowing for a more compact vehicle and the cost of production thereof is reduced due to the use of a single belt.

The prime mover is an engine having a vertically axial crankshaft. The output shaft of the engine is vertically axially disposed such that the transmitting mechanism is between the output shaft of the engine and the input shafts of the first and second HSTs.

Furthermore, a cutting deck is provided to the vehicle with a driving apparatus of the present invention. The vehicle can spin or turn at a small radius beside or among trees or buildings, thereby enabling the lawn mowing to be performed efficiently.

A second object of the present invention is to provide a compact, low production cost driving apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle including a pair of similar HSTs and a pair of similar differential output gear units which are separated from but drivingly connected with their respective HST, enabling the vehicle provided with the driving apparatus to be operated in a straight line without requiring adjustment to equalizing output of both left and right axles, and to have a small turning circle.

To achieve the second object, the driving apparatus comprises a first HST driven by a prime mover, a first differential gear unit and a pair of left and right first differential output shafts for the purpose of speed changing in advancing and reversing. The driving apparatus also comprises a second HST driven by the prime mover, a second differential gear unit and a pair of left and right second differential output shafts for the purpose of steering. A pair of drive trains are interposed between the first and second differential output shafts, wherein one of the drive trains drivingly connects the left first and left second output shafts with each other, the other drive train drivingly connects the right first and second output shafts with each other, such that the first and second differential output shafts connected by one of the two drive trains are rotated in the same direction with respect to each other and the other first and second differential output shafts connected by the other drive train are rotated in opposite directions with respect to each other.

An HST unit and a differential gear unit separate from each other are widely produced at low cost because of their simple structures, so that the driving apparatus constructed by assembly of them can be reduced in cost.

In such a construction, the output regulating member of the first HST is connected with a speed changing operating tool, such as a foot pedal, to be used for speed changing in advancing and reversing. Driving wheels are attached to the first differential output shafts. The output regulating member of the second HST is connected with a steering operating tool, such a steering wheel, to be used for steering.

Accordingly, the vehicle can spin or turn at a small radius. Also, the first differential output shafts projecting laterally from the single first differential gear unit can be used as left and right driving axles, so that the left and right axles do not need to be adjusted to equalize their speed, thereby simplifying the work when operating the vehicle in forward or reverse. Additionally, in a vehicle with multiple wheels, only the differential drive of the pair of driving wheels attached to the first differential output shafts is required for steering, thereby allowing a vehicle with multiple wheels to have simple driven wheels.

The speed of advancing and reversing of the vehicle can be steplessly changed by operation of the speed changing operating tool (the foot pedal) easily because of the stepless

output regulation of the first HST. The vehicle can be steered smoothly and easily by operation of the steering operating tool (the steering wheel) because of the stepless output regulation of the second HST.

The linkage between the speed changing operating tool and the output regulating member of the first HST and the linkage between the steering operating tool and the output regulating member of the second HST are simple and compact. These linkages are compactly disposed below an operator's deck.

With regard to the transmitting mechanism between an output shaft of the prime mover and the input shafts of the first and second HSTs of the first and second driving units, the output shaft is disposed between the input shafts of the first and second HST. Pulleys fixed onto the output shaft of the prime mover and the two input shafts of the first and second HSTs are bound with a single belt. Accordingly, the space required for the transmitting mechanism is small, thereby allowing for a more compact vehicle and the cost of production thereof is reduced due to the use of a single belt.

The prime mover is an engine having a vertically axial crankshaft. The output shaft of the engine is vertically axially disposed such that the transmitting mechanism is between the output shaft of the engine and the input shafts of the first and second HSTs.

Furthermore, a mower unit is provided to the vehicle with a driving apparatus of the present invention. The vehicle can spin or turn at a small radius beside or among trees or buildings, thereby enabling the lawn mowing to be performed efficiently.

These and other objects of the invention will become more apparent in the detailed description and examples which follows.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS/ FIGURES

FIG. 1 is a side view showing an entire lawn tractor provided with a driving apparatus of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a plan view of a pair of driving units disposed in a longitudinal row.

FIG. 3 is a right side view of a pair of driving units disposed in a longitudinal row.

FIG. 4 is a left side view a pair of driving units disposed in a longitudinal row.

FIG. 5 is a sectional plan view a pair of driving units disposed in a longitudinal row.

FIG. 6 is a diagram of a power transmitting system of the driving apparatus.

FIG. 7 is a side view showing another entire lawn tractor provided with the driving apparatus of the present invention, wherein a seat is mounted above the driving apparatus.

FIG. 8 is a schematic side view showing another entire lawn mower provided with the driving apparatus of the present invention, wherein a cutting deck is provided in front of the vehicle thereof, and

FIG. 9 is a diagram of a power transmitting system of another driving apparatus of the present invention comprising a pair of driving units, wherein each driving unit includes an HST unit and an differential gear unit separated from each other.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

As best seen in FIG. 1, the overall construction of a lawn tractor 1 provided with a driving apparatus of the present invention will be explained.

A front column **13** is provided upright on a front portion of a vehicle chassis **12**. A steering wheel **14** as a steering operating tool projects upwardly from front column **13**. A speed change pedal **15** and brake pedals (not shown) are disposed beside front column **13**. A pair of front wheels **16** are disposed respectively on both lateral sides of the front lower portion of vehicle chassis **12**. Front wheels **16** are caster wheels, having substantially vertical pivots, so that they can be horizontally rotated smoothly so as to be rapidly oriented toward the aiming direction when the vehicle turns by differential driving of left and right driving wheels. Thus, the feeling in steering of the vehicle can be improved. A single front wheel **16** or more than two front wheels **16** may be also used.

A seat **17** is mounted on a center portion of vehicle chassis **12**. A deck portion **12a** is formed as an operator's footboard on an upper end of vehicle chassis **12** in the vicinity of a front of seat **17**. A mower unit **9** (a mower) is disposed below deck portion **12a**. Mower unit **9** comprises a casing **19** provided therein with at least one rotary blade, which is driven by power from an engine **11** through pulleys, belt and the like. Mower unit **9** is suspended at front and rear portions of its casing **19** by linkages which are vertically movable.

Engine **11** is mounted on a rear portion of vehicle chassis **12** and is covered with a bonnet. Engine **11** has a vertically axial crankshaft provided with a vertically downwardly projecting output shaft **11a**. An output pulley **20** is fixed onto a lower end of output shaft **11a**.

A driving apparatus **2** of the present invention is disposed on the lower rear portion of vehicle chassis **12**. As shown in FIGS. **2**, **3** and **4**, driving apparatus **2** consists of a first driving unit **21** for speed changing in advancing and reversing and a second driving unit **22** for steering, which contain substantially similarly constructed hydrostatic transmissions (HSTs), respectively. Second driving unit **22** is preferably disposed in rear of first driving unit **21**. They are oriented in longitudinally opposite directions and are fixed to vehicle chassis **12**. Second driving unit **22** alternatively may be disposed in front of first driving unit **21**.

A first input shaft **25** projects from a housing **23** of first driving unit **21** and a second input shaft **26** projects from a housing **24** of second driving unit **22**.

A first input pulley **27** and a fan **39** is fixed onto first input shaft **25** and a second input pulley **28** and another fan **39** is fixed onto second input shaft **26**. Output pulley **20** and a tension pulley **29** are disposed in a space between first and second input pulleys **27** and **28**. All the pulleys **20**, **27** and **28** are tied together with a single belt **30**, so that first and second input shafts **25** and **26** can receive the power of engine **11** simultaneously. Tension pulley **29** is pushed against belt **30**.

Another pulley **31** is fixed onto first input shaft **25**. A support boss **32** is provided upright on a longitudinal intermediate of vehicle chassis **12**. A counter shaft **33** rotatably penetrates support boss **32**. For the purpose of driving of mower unit **9**, pulleys **34** and **35** are fixed onto both upper and lower ends of counter shaft **33**, and a belt **36** are interposed between pulleys **31** and **34**. A belt tension clutch **37** may be disposed between pulleys **35** and **38**, thereby enabling mower unit **9** to be drivingly switched on and off.

A pair of first differential output shafts (axles) **40L** and **40R** project respectively from both lateral sides of housing **23** of first driving unit **21**. Sprockets **41L** and **41R** are fixed respectively onto first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R**. Rear wheels **43** are fixed respectively onto first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** so as to be disposed outside of sprockets **41L** and **41R**, respectively.

With respect to the conventional vehicle provided with a pair of driving units disposed in lateral row, left and right driving axles are independently driven by the pair of driving units, which are separated from each other, thereby requiring output of the driving units to be equalized for straight advancing and reversing of the vehicle. However, the vehicle of the present invention is constructed so that the left and right axles constituted by first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** are differentially connected with each other by a single differential gear unit within housing **23** of first driving unit **21**, thereby requiring no adjustment to equalize the output of the axles.

Vehicle **1** turns substantially around either rear wheel **43**. As shown in FIG. **7**, seat **17** may also be disposed just above first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R**. This places seat **17** vertically in line with rear wheels **43**, thereby reducing the force on an operator when vehicle **1** is turned or spun.

FIG. **8** shows an alternative arrangement of vehicle **1** in which mower unit **9** is disposed in front of the vehicle body. In this arrangement, engine **11** is disposed in front of the driver's deck, driving wheels **43** are located in the front of vehicle **1** and caster wheels **16** are at the rear of vehicle **1**. Such a construction allows mower unit **9** to cut the grass before any wheels have pressed down the grass. Also, vehicle **1** can mow easily with respect to a place which the vehicle body cannot enter, for example, a place beneath branches of a tree, because forwardly projecting mower unit **9** can enter such a place.

Returning to FIGS. **2**, **3** and **4**, a pair of second differential output shafts (steering output shafts) **44L** and **44R** project respectively from both lateral sides of housing **24** of second driving unit **22**. Sprockets **45L** and **45R** are fixed respectively onto second differential output shafts **44L** and **44R**. Sprocket **45L** is diametrically smaller than **41L**, and sprocket **45R** is diametrically smaller than sprocket **41R**.

At one of the lateral sides (at a left side in this embodiment) of housings **23** and **24**, a chain **46** is interposed between sprockets **41L** and **45L**, thereby constituting a first drive train. At the other side (right side in this embodiment), a sprocket **47** is disposed behind sprocket **45R** and is rotatably supported onto a shaft **48** projecting laterally from vehicle chassis **12**, and a chain **49** is interposed between sprockets **41R** and **47**, thereby constituting a second drive train.

Sprocket **45R** engages at its lower end with chain **49**. Accordingly, sprockets **41L** and **45L** or first and second differential shafts **40L** and **44L** of the first drive train are rotated in the same direction, and sprockets **41R** and **45R** or first and second differential shafts **40R** and **44R** of the second drive train are rotated in opposite directions. Thus, if second differential output shafts **44L** and **44R** rotates in the same rotational direction when both first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** are neutral, sprockets **45L** and **45R** are rotated in the same rotational direction, so that first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** are rotated in the opposite rotational directions. Gears, gears and shafts, belts and pulleys or the like may be used in place of the sprockets and chains for the purpose of constituting the first and second drive trains.

Next, explanation will be given on inner structures of first and second driving units **21** and **22**, in accordance with FIGS. **5** and **6**.

Housings **23** and **24** of first and second driving units **21** and **22** are similarly constructed. Each of housings **23** and **24** contains an HST, a differential gear unit, a drive train between the HST and the differential gear unit, and a pair of

differential output shafts, all which comprise common components and are similarly structured.

At first, first driving unit **21** will be described. Housing **23**, which consists of vertically divided halves separably joined with each other, contains a first HST, first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** and a drive train drivingly connecting first HST with differential output shafts **40L** and **40R**. First HST comprises a L-like shaped center section **51** having a horizontal pump mounting surface and a vertical motor mounting surface, a hydraulic pump **52** mounted onto the horizontal pump mounting surface and a hydraulic motor **53** mounted onto the vertical motor mounting surface. Hydraulic motor **53** is disposed in front of hydraulic pump **52**. Hydraulic pump **52** and hydraulic motor **53** are fluidly connected with each other through a closed fluid circuit formed within center section **51**.

Housing **23** is constructed so that vertically divided halves are joined at their flat surrounding joint surfaces with each other along a horizontal joint plane. Bearing portions for a motor shaft **54** and a counter shaft **55** are provided on their joint surfaces, so that motor shaft **54** and counter shaft **55** are rotatably supported with their axes disposed on the horizontal joint plane. Bearing portions for rotatably supporting first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** are eccentrically disposed above the horizontal joint plane. First differential output shafts **40L** and **40R** are differentially connected with each other through a differential gear unit **56** and respectively project at their utmost end portions laterally outwardly from the left and right outside ends of housing **23**.

Hydraulic pump **52** is mounted on the horizontal pump mounting surface of center section **51**. In this regard, an input shaft **25** as a pump shaft is vertically disposed along the axis of hydraulic pump **52**. A cylinder block is anchored to input shaft **25** and is rotatably and slidably mounted on the horizontal pump mounting surface. A plurality of pistons are reciprocally movably inserted into the cylinder block through biasing springs. The heads of the pistons abut against a movable swash plate **57**. Thus, by slanting operation of movable swash plate **57** as an output regulating member, the amount and direction of oil discharged from hydraulic pump **52** can be changed.

For the purpose of slanting operation of movable swash plate **57**, a control shaft **59** is pivoted onto a side wall of housing **23** in parallel with first differential output shaft **40R**. A neutral spring **61** for biasing movable swash plate **57** to its neutral position is fitted around a portion of control shaft **59** within housing **23**, so as to enable its neutral position to be adjusted. A control arm **60** is fixed onto a portion of control shaft **59** out of housing **23** and is connected to a speed changing operating tool like a lever or a pedal through a link **62** and the like.

In this embodiment, the speed changing operating tool is speed change pedal **15**. Speed change pedal **15** is pivoted at its longitudinally middle portion so that vehicle **1** advances by treading the front half portion of speed change pedal **15** and reverses by treading the rear half portion thereof. The speed of advancing and reversing of the vehicle can be steplessly controlled in proportion to degree of rotation of speed change pedal **15** by treading thereof. Speed change pedal **15** is shown constructed like a seesaw, but may alternatively be divided into two pedals. Other constructions can also replace it for a speed changing tool.

Link **62** is compactly disposed substantially longitudinally below deck portion **12a**. In a conventional driving apparatus also comprised a pair of driving units with each used for both speed changing and steering, the speed chang-

ing operating tool, such as a pedal, required complicated connections to output regulating members of both HSTs units through a complicated linkage, for example a pair of links. Speed change pedal **15** of driving apparatus **2** of the present invention, to the contrary, is connected to only single control arm **60** through only single link **62**, because only movable swash plate **57** of first driving unit **21** is used as an output regulating member for speed changing. Thus, vehicle **1** can be constructed more compactly and at a reduced cost.

In such a construction, control arm **60** is rotated along the longitudinal direction of the vehicle by rotational operation of speed change pedal **15** and movable swash plate **57** is slanted by rotation of control shaft **59**, so that the amount and direction of operating oil discharged from hydraulic pump **52**.

The pressure oil from hydraulic pump **52** is charged into hydraulic motor **53** through oil passages bored within center section **51**. Hydraulic motor **53** comprises a cylinder block **63** rotatably slidably mounted onto the vertical motor mounting surface of center section **51**. A plurality of cylinder holes are bored in cylinder block **63** and a plurality of pistons **64** are reciprocally movably inserted into the cylinder holes through biasing springs, respectively. Pistons **64** abut at their head against a fixed swash plate **65**. Motor shaft **54** is horizontally disposed along the rotational axis of cylinder block **63** and is not relatively rotatably anchored to cylinder block **63**. Hydraulic motor **53** is just so constructed.

Motor shaft **54** is provided thereon with a brake unit **66**. A gear **67** is fixed onto an end portion of motor shaft **54**. Gear **67** engages with a large diametric gear **68** fixed onto counter shaft **55**. A small diametric gear **69** also fixed onto counter shaft **55** engages with a ring gear **70** of differential gear unit **56**. Differential gear unit **56** is driven in state that ring gear **70** is rotated at reduced speed by the power transmitted from motor shaft **54**, thereby driving left and right first differential output shafts **40L** and **40R**.

Second driving unit **22**, which is disposed in a longitudinally opposite direction as first driving unit **21**, similarly comprises housing **24** and a second HST including a hydraulic pump **71** and a hydraulic motor **72** contained in housing **24**. A control shaft **73** for rotating a movable swash plate **76** of hydraulic pump **71** projects leftwardly from housing **24**. A control arm **74** is fixed onto a portion of control shaft **73** out of housing **24** and is connected to steering wheel **14** through a link **75** and the like. Link **75** is compactly disposed substantially longitudinally below deck portion **12a**. As shown in FIG. 6, a pinion **77** is fixed onto a basic portion of a stem of steering wheel **14** and engages with a fan-shaped gear **78**. Gear **78** is connected with link **75**. Thus, by rotational operation of steering wheel **14**, gear **78** engages with pinion **77** and is rotated at reduced speed, so as to rotate movable swash plate **76** through link **75**. Steering wheel **14** is rotatable from a straight travelling position in two opposite directions to the limits determined by gear **78**.

Similar to the simplified construction described above for link **62** interposed between speed change pedal **15** and control arm **60**, steering wheel **14** as a steering operating tool is simply connected to only single control arm **74** through single link **75** because only movable swash plate **76** of second driving unit **22** is used as an output regulating member for steering. As opposed to the complex linkages required for a steering and speed changing in a conventional system wherein each is connected to two laterally disposed HSTs which independently drive left and right axles, the linkages for steering and for speed change in accordance with the present invention are simplified, compact, and

reduced in cost, thereby contributing to providing a compact vehicle at low cost.

Next, explanation will be given on controlling operation of a vehicle provided with driving apparatus 2 of the present invention so constructed as the above mentioned. When engine 11 is driven, input shafts 25 and 26 are always driven. For the purpose of straight advancing or reversing, steering wheel 14 is set in state of straight moving, so that second driving unit 22 is neutral. In this condition, movable swash plate 57 of first driving unit 21 is rotated by forward or rearward tread of speed change pedal 15. Thus, first differential output shafts 40L and 40R are driven at even speed, so that the vehicle advances or reverses.

When steering wheel 14 is rotated for right turning in state that the vehicle is advancing or reversing, movable swash plate 76 of second driving unit 22 is rotated so that hydraulic motor 72 is driven, thereby driving second differential output shafts 44L and 44R, so as to transmit an accelerating power to left first differential output shaft 40L, and second differential output shaft 44R is rotated oppositely to first differential output shaft 40R through sprockets 45R, 47 and 41R, thereby transmitting a decelerating power to right first differential output shaft 40R, so that vehicle 1 turns right. If steering wheel 14 is rotated so as to rotate hydraulic motor 72 in reverse direction, left differential output shaft 44L transmits a decelerating force to left differential output shaft 40L and right differential output shaft 44R transmits an accelerating force to right differential output shaft 40R, whereby vehicle 1 turns left.

When speed change pedal 15 is not trod, hydraulic pump 52 of first driving unit 21 is neutral. Then, if steering wheel 14 is rotated, movable swash plate 76 of second driving unit 22 is rotated so as to drive hydraulic motor 72. When second differential output shafts 44L and 44R are rotated in regular direction, left first differential output shaft 40L is rotated in advancing direction and right first differential output shaft 40R is rotated in reverse direction, so that vehicle 1 spins rightwardly. If steering wheel 14 is rotated so as to rotate second differential output shafts 44L and 44R in reverse direction, vehicle 1 spins leftwardly.

Driving apparatus 2 uses a pair of common structured driving units 21 and 22, each of which comprises an HST, a differential gear unit, a drive train between the HST and the differential gear unit and a pair of differential output shafts, one for speed changing in advancing and reversing and the other for steering, so that a common driving unit of the generally conventional structure can be used for the two different purposes, thereby reducing cost.

In another embodiment of the present invention, as shown in FIG. 9, driving apparatus 2' comprises a pair of a first driving system 21' for speed changing in advancing and reversing and a second driving system 22' for steering. Driving system 21' is constructed so that a first HST unit 80 and a first differential gear unit 81, which is separated from first HST unit 80 (that is, not contained within a housing of first HST unit 80), are drivingly connected with each other by a drive train such as a gear train, a chain and sprockets, belt and pulleys or the like. Second driving system 22' comprising a second HST unit 82 and a second differential gear unit 83 is similarly constructed, so that second differential gear unit 83 is separated from second HST unit 82.

Each of first and second HST units 80 and 82 comprises a housing and a hydraulic pump P and a hydraulic motor M, both of which are fluidly connected with each other, contained in the housing and disposed so that an input shaft Pa as a pump shaft of hydraulic pump P is vertically axially

oriented and an output shaft Ma as a motor shaft of hydraulic motor M is horizontally laterally axially oriented. Each of first and second differential gear units 81 and 83 is disposed so that its respective input member (not shown), such as a gear, a sprocket, a pulley or the like is horizontally laterally axially disposed. Thus, each of the driving trains such as a gear train, a chain, a belt or the like is interposed longitudinally, vertically or longitudinally slantingly between output member Ma and the input member.

Each of differential gear units 81 and 83 is provided with left and right differential output shafts. Left and right first differential output shafts 40L and 40R as axles project laterally from both lateral sides of first differential gear unit 81. Left and right second differential output shafts 44L and 44R as driving shafts for steering project laterally from both lateral sides of second differential gear unit 83. The drive trains between left first and left second differential output shafts 40L and 44L and between right first and right second differential output shafts 40R and 44R are structured similarly with those of the above mentioned driving apparatus 2. In this regard, the left drive train between left differential output shafts 40L and 44L comprises chain 46 and sprockets 41L and 45L and the right drive train between right differential output shafts 40R and 44R comprises chain 49 and sprockets 41R, 45R and 47, so that left and right drive trains are so constructed as to be rotated in opposite directions to each other. Each of the drive trains may be replaced by a gear train, a belt and pulleys or the like.

In such an alternative embodiment, there are an HST unit and a differential gear unit independent to each other, which are widely produced. Each of the HST unit and the differential gear unit can be obtained at low cost because of its simple structure. Thus, driving apparatus 2' can be constructed at low cost by assembly of generally available HST units and differential gear units.

The previously described structures of driving apparatus 2 such as the linkage connecting movable swash plates of first and second HST units 21 and 22 respectively to speed change pedal 15 and steering wheel 14, the transmitting mechanism from output pulley 20 of engine 11 to input pulleys 27 and 28 of first and second HSTs through single belt 30, the attachment of mower unit 9 and other constructions can be similarly applied to driving apparatus 2'.

What is claimed is:

1. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:
 - a vehicle chassis;
 - a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;
 - a pair of drive wheels;
 - a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,
 - a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,
 - a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and
 - driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and
 - a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,
 - a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,

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a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and

steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means.

2. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said second transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

3. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said first and second axles of said first driving unit are extended perpendicularly to the traveling direction of said vehicle so as to be opposite to each other, and said first and second steering output shafts are extended in parallel to said first and second axles.

4. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 3, wherein said first and second driving units are aligned along the traveling direction of said vehicle.

5. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 4, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions so that said first and second drive trains are disposed oppositely to each other with respect to said first and second driving units, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said second transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

6. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said first transmission is a hydrostatic stepless transmission comprising a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other.

7. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles, a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and

driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and

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a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,

a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and

steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein said first transmission is a hydrostatic stepless transmission comprising a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other and wherein said driving output setting means comprises a movable swash plate of said hydrostatic stepless transmission serving as said first transmission.

8. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said driving output setting means interlocks with a speed control operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle.

9. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles, a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and

driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and

a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,

a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and

steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein said driving output setting means interlocks with a speed control operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle and wherein a linkage interposed between said driving output setting means and said speed control operating member is disposed below said driver's portion of said vehicle.

10. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

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a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles, a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and
 5 driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and
 10 a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,
 a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,
 a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and
 15 steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,
 20 wherein said driving output setting means interlocks with a speed control operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle and wherein said driving output setting means comprises a lever rotated along the traveling direction of said vehicle according to the operation of said speed control operating member.

11. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 10, wherein said lever of said driving output setting means interlocks with a movable swash plate of a hydrostatic stepless transmission serving as said first transmission comprising a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other.

12. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 8, wherein said speed control operating member is a foot pedal.

13. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 12, wherein said foot pedal comprises a forward driving pedal and a backward driving pedal, and wherein a direction of output rotation of said first transmission is determined according to which is pressed, said forward driving pedal or said backward driving pedal.

14. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said first driving unit comprises a first differential mechanism differentially connecting said first and second axles, so that the output of said first transmission is transmitted to said first and second axles through said first differential mechanism.

15. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 14, wherein said first driving unit comprises a common housing so that said first transmission and said first differential mechanism are disposed in said common housing.

16. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 14, wherein said first driving unit comprises a housing so that said first transmission is disposed in said housing and said first differential mechanism is disposed outside said housing.

17. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said second transmission is a hydrostatic stepless transmission comprising a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other.

18. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

- a vehicle chassis;
- a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;
- a pair of drive wheels;
- a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

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a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles, a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and
 5 driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and
 10 a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,
 a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,
 a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and
 15 steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,
 20 wherein said second transmission is a hydrostatic stepless transmission comprising a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other and wherein said steering output setting means comprises a movable swash plate of said hydrostatic stepless transmission serving as said second transmission.

19. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein said steering output setting means interlocks with a steering operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle.

20. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

- a vehicle chassis;
- a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;
- a pair of drive wheels;
- a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,
- a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,
- a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and
- driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and
- a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,
- a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,
- a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and
- steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,
- wherein said steering output setting means interlocks with a steering operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle and wherein a linkage interposed between said steering output setting means and

said steering operating member is disposed below said driver's portion of said vehicle.

21. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,

a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and

driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and

a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,

a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and

steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein said steering output setting means interlocks with a steering operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle and wherein said steering output setting means comprises a lever rotated along the traveling direction of said vehicle according to the operation of said steering operating member.

22. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **21**, wherein said lever of said steering output setting means interlocks with a movable swash plate of a hydrostatic stepless transmission serving as said second transmission comprising a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other.

23. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **19**, wherein said steering operating member is a steering wheel.

24. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **23**, wherein said steering wheel is rotatable from a straight traveling position in two opposite directions for left-turning and right-turning of said vehicle, and wherein a direction of output rotation of said second transmission is determined according to which direction said steering wheel is rotated from said straight traveling position.

25. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **1**, wherein said second driving unit comprises a second differential mechanism differentially connecting said first and second steering output shafts, so that the output of said second transmission is transmitted to said first and second steering output shafts through said second differential mechanism.

26. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **25**, wherein said second driving unit comprises a common housing so that said second transmission and said second differential mechanism are disposed in said common housing.

27. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **25**, wherein said second driving unit comprises a housing so that

said second transmission is disposed in said housing and said second differential mechanism is disposed outside said housing.

28. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **1**, wherein said first driving unit comprises a first differential mechanism differentially connecting said first and second axles, so that the output of said first transmission is transmitted to said first and second axles through said first differential mechanism, and wherein said second driving unit comprises a second differential mechanism differentially connecting said first and second steering output shafts, so that the output of said second transmission is transmitted to said first and second steering output shafts through said second differential mechanism.

29. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **25**, wherein said first driving unit comprises a common first housing so that said first transmission and said first differential mechanism are disposed in said common first housing of said first driving unit, and wherein said second driving unit comprises a second common housing so that said second transmission and said second differential mechanism are disposed in said second common housing of said second driving unit.

30. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **29**, wherein said first and second driving units are aligned along the traveling direction of said vehicle, wherein said first and second axles supported by said first housing are extended perpendicularly to the traveling direction of said vehicle in opposite to each other, and wherein said first and second steering output shafts supported by said second housing are extended in parallel to said first and second axles, so that said first axle and said first steering output shaft are disposed on one side of said first and second housings and said second axle and said second steering output shaft are disposed on the other side of said first and second housings.

31. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **30**, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions so that said first and second drive trains are disposed oppositely to each other with respect to said first and second housings, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said second transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

32. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **28**, wherein said first driving unit comprises a first housing so that said first transmission is disposed in said first housing and said first differential mechanism is disposed outside said first housing, and wherein said second driving unit comprises a second housing so that said second transmission is disposed in said second housing and said second differential mechanism is disposed outside said second housing.

33. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **32**, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions,

wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said second transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

34. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **1**, wherein said driving output setting means interlocks with a speed control operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle, and wherein said steering output setting means interlocks with a steering operating member provided on said driver's portion of said vehicle.

35. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,

a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and

driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and

a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,

a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and

steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein said driving output setting means interlocks with a speed control operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle, and wherein said steering output setting means interlocks with a steering operating member provided on said driver's portion of said vehicle and wherein linkages interposed between said driving output setting means and said speed control operating member and interposed between said steering output setting means and said steering operating member are disposed below said driver's portion of said vehicle.

36. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **34**, wherein said driving output setting means comprises a lever rotated along the traveling direction of said vehicle according to the operation of said speed control operating member, and wherein said steering output setting means comprises a lever rotated along the traveling direction of said vehicle according to the operation of said steering operating member.

37. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **34**, wherein said speed control operating member is a foot pedal and said steering operating member is a steering wheel.

38. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **37**, wherein said foot pedal comprises a forward driving pedal and a backward driving pedal, and wherein a direction of output rotation of said first transmission is determined

according to which is pressed, said forward driving pedal or said backward driving pedal.

39. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **37**, wherein said steering wheel is rotatable from a straight traveling position in two opposite directions for left-turning and right-turning of said vehicle, and wherein a direction of output rotation of said second transmission is determined according to which direction said steering wheel is rotated from said straight traveling position.

40. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,

a first transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and

driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said first transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and

a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,

a second transmission transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and

steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said second transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein an output shaft of said prime mover is disposed between an input shaft of said first transmission and an input shaft of said second transmission.

41. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **40**, wherein three pulleys respectively provided on said output shaft of said prime mover and input shafts of said first and second transmissions are bound through a single belt.

42. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **41**, wherein said prime mover is an engine provided with a crankshaft having a vertical axis.

43. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **1**, wherein at least one caster is supported by said vehicle chassis.

44. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **1**, wherein said vehicle is provided with a mower unit.

45. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;

a pair of drive wheels;

a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,

a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,

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a first hydrostatic stepless transmission including a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other for transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said first hydrostatic stepless transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and

a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising, a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other, a second hydrostatic stepless transmission including a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other for transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission determined by said steering output setting means.

46. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **45**, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

47. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **46**, wherein said first and second axles of said first driving unit are extended perpendicularly to the traveling direction of said vehicle so as to be opposite to each other, and said first and second steering output shafts are extended in parallel to said first and second axles.

48. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **47**, wherein said first and second driving units are aligned along the traveling direction of said vehicle.

49. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **48**, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions so that said first and second drive trains are disposed oppositely to each other with respect to said first and second driving units, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

50. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **45**, wherein said first driving unit comprises a first differential

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mechanism differentially connecting said first and second axles, so that the output of said hydraulic motor of said first hydrostatic stepless transmission is transmitted to said first and second axles through said first differential mechanism, and wherein said second driving unit comprises a second differential mechanism differentially connecting said first and second steering output shafts, so that the output of said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission is transmitted to said first and second steering output shafts through said second differential mechanism.

51. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **50**, wherein said first driving unit comprises a common first housing so that said first hydrostatic stepless transmission and said first differential mechanism are disposed in said common first housing of said first driving unit, and wherein said second driving unit comprises a second common housing so that said second hydrostatic stepless transmission and said second differential mechanism are disposed in said second common housing of said second driving unit.

52. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **51**, wherein said first and second driving units are aligned along the traveling direction of said vehicle, wherein said first and second axles supported by said first housing are extended perpendicularly to the traveling direction of said vehicle in opposite to each other, and wherein said first and second steering output shafts supported by said second housing are extended in parallel to said first and second axles, so that said first axle and said first steering output shaft are disposed on one side of said first and second housings and said second axle and said second steering output shaft are disposed on the other side of said first and second housings.

53. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **52**, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions so that said first and second drive trains are disposed oppositely to each other with respect to said first and second housings, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

54. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **53**, wherein said first driving unit comprises a first housing so that said first hydrostatic stepless transmission is disposed in said first housing and said first differential mechanism is disposed outside said first housing, and wherein said second driving unit comprises a second housing so that said second hydrostatic stepless transmission is disposed in said second housing and said second differential mechanism is disposed outside said second housing.

55. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **54**, further comprising:

a first drive train interlocking said first axle and said first steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said first axle and said first steering output shaft in the same direction, and

a second drive train interlocking said second axle and said second steering output shaft with each other so as to rotate said second axle and said second steering output shaft in opposite directions, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven by said hydro-

lic motor of said second stepless transmission so as to generate a difference of rotation between said first and second axles.

56. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

- a vehicle chassis;
- a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;
- a pair of drive wheels;
- a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,
 - a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,
 - a first hydrostatic stepless transmission including a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other for transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said first hydrostatic stepless transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and
- a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,
 - a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,
 - a second hydrostatic stepless transmission including a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other for transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and
 - steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein said driving output setting means comprises a movable swash plate of said hydraulic pump or said hydraulic motor of said first hydrostatic stepless transmission, and wherein said steering output setting means comprises a movable swash plate of said hydraulic pump or said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission.

57. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **56**, wherein said movable swash plate of said driving output setting means interlocks with a speed control operating member provided on a driver's portion of said vehicle, and wherein said movable swash plate of said steering output setting means interlocks with a steering operating member provided on said driver's portion of said vehicle.

58. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **57**, wherein linkages interposed between said movable swash plate of said driving output setting means and said speed control operating member and interposed between said movable swash plate of said steering output setting means and said steering operating member are disposed below said driver's portion of said vehicle.

59. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **57**, wherein said driving output setting means comprises a lever rotated along the traveling direction of said vehicle according to the operation of said speed control operating member, and wherein said steering output setting means comprises a lever rotated along the traveling direction of said vehicle according to the operation of said steering operating member.

60. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **57**, wherein said speed control operating member is a foot pedal and said steering operating member is a steering wheel.

61. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **60**, wherein said foot pedal comprises a forward driving pedal and a backward driving pedal, and wherein a direction of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said first hydrostatic stepless transmission is determined according to which is pressed, said forward driving pedal or said backward driving pedal.

62. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **60**, wherein said steering wheel is rotatable from a straight traveling position in two opposite directions for left-turning and right-turning of said vehicle, and wherein a direction of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission is determined according to which direction said steering wheel is rotated from said straight traveling position.

63. A transaxle apparatus for speed changing and steering of a vehicle, comprising:

- a vehicle chassis;
- a prime mover mounted on said vehicle chassis;
- a pair of drive wheels;
- a first driving unit for driving said pair of drive wheels forwardly and backwardly at various speeds, said first driving unit comprising,
 - a pair of first and second axles differentially connected with each other, said pair of drive wheels being mounted onto said respective first and second axles,
 - a first hydrostatic stepless transmission including a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other for transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second axles, and driving output setting means, wherein said first and second axles are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said first hydrostatic stepless transmission determined by said driving output setting means; and
- a second driving unit for generating a difference of rotary speed between said pair of drive wheels so as to steer a vehicle, said second driving unit comprising,
 - a pair of first and second steering output shafts differentially connected with each other,
 - a second hydrostatic stepless transmission including a hydraulic pump and a hydraulic motor fluidly connected with each other for transmitting power from said prime mover to said first and second steering output shafts, and
 - steering output setting means, wherein said first and second steering output shafts are driven according to a direction and speed of output rotation of said hydraulic motor of said second hydrostatic stepless transmission determined by said steering output setting means,

wherein an output shaft of said prime mover is disposed between an input shaft of said first transmission and an input shaft of said second transmission.

64. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **63**, wherein three pulleys respectively provided on said output shaft of said prime mover and input shafts of said first and second transmissions are bound through a single belt.

65. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **64**, wherein said prime mover is an engine provided with a crankshaft having a vertical axis.

66. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim **45**, wherein at least one caster is supported by said vehicle chassis.

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67. The transaxle apparatus as set forth in claim 45, wherein said vehicle is provided with a mower unit.

68. A vehicle comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on a rear portion of said vehicle chassis;

a pair of first and second drive wheels;

a first axle coupled with said first drive wheel;

a second axle coupled with said second drive wheel;

a transaxle apparatus supported by said vehicle chassis and supporting said first and second axles for speed changing and steering of said vehicle, said transaxle apparatus including

a driving transmission for driving said vehicle and a steering transmission, said driving transmission drivingly connecting said prime mover to said first and second axles for rotating said first and second drive wheels at various speeds forwardly and backwardly,

a manually operable first output regulating member constituting said driving transmission for controlling the speed and direction of output rotation of said driving transmission,

a steering transmission for turning said vehicle, said steering transmission drivingly connecting said prime mover to said first and second axles for accelerating one of said first and second drive wheels and decelerating the other of said first and second drive wheels, and

a manually operable second output regulating member constituting said steering transmission for controlling the speed and direction of output rotation of said steering transmission;

a steering wheel for manual operation of said second regulating member, said steering wheel provided with a straight driving position for stopping the output rotation of said second transmission and being rotatable from said straight driving position; and

a linkage interposed between said steering wheel and said second regulating member, said linkage including

a stem of said steering wheel,

a first lever interlocking with said stem,

a control shaft constituting said second output regulating member, said control shaft provided with a neutral position corresponding to said straight driving position and being rotatable in opposite directions from said neutral position,

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a second lever interlocking with said control shaft, and a link connecting said first lever to said second lever.

69. The vehicle according to claim 68, wherein said first lever is a fan-shaped gear.

70. The vehicle according to claim 69, further comprising: a pinion provided in said stem, said pinion engaging with said fan-shaped gear.

71. The vehicle according to claim 68, wherein said second lever is a control arm fixed on said control shaft.

72. A vehicle comprising:

a vehicle chassis;

a prime mover mounted on a rear portion of said vehicle chassis;

a pair of first and second drive wheels;

a first axle coupled with said first drive wheel;

a second axle coupled with said second drive wheel;

a transaxle apparatus supported by said vehicle chassis and supporting said first and second axles for speed changing and steering of said vehicle, said transaxle apparatus including

a driving transmission for driving said vehicle and a steering transmission, said driving transmission drivingly connecting said prime mover to said first and second axles for rotating said first and second drive wheels at various speeds forwardly and backwardly,

a manually operable first output regulating member constituting said driving transmission for controlling the speed and direction of output rotation of said driving transmission,

a steering transmission for turning said vehicle, said steering transmission drivingly connecting said prime mover to said first and second axles for accelerating one of said first and second drive wheels and decelerating the other of said first and second drive wheels, and

a manually operable second output regulating member constituting said steering transmission for controlling the speed and direction of output rotation of said steering transmission;

a steering operation means for manual operation of said second regulating member; and

a mechanical linkage interposed between said steering operation means and said second regulating member.

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